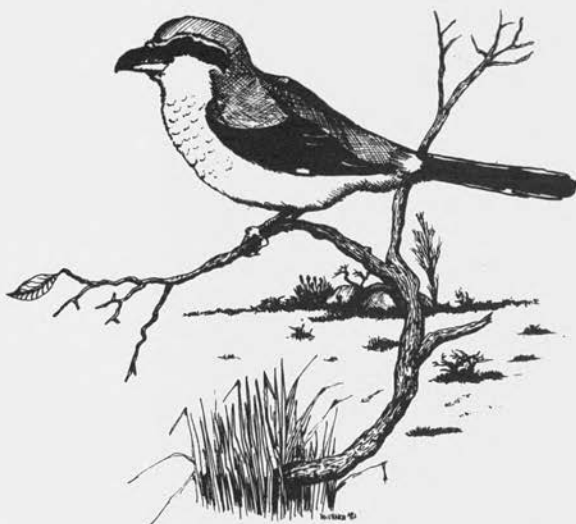


FEEDING BEHAVIOR OF A NORTHERN SHRIKE

by George W. Gavutis, Jr.

On January 13, 1982, at 9:15 a.m., Messrs. G. W. Gavutis, D. Spencer, and R. A. Zelle of the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge observed and photographed a hunting Northern Shrike (Lanius excubitor) for an hour or so. The bird (an adult) was between Cross Farm Hill and the Stage Island dike along the refuge road. The bird made numerous apparent hunting forays from hunting perches atop the tall shrubs and small trees (10'-20' high) near the road - seldom sitting still for more than a few moments.

Following one flight to the ground at the saltmarsh edge, the bird was seen to emerge from the grass and struggle into the air to a height of 20 feet or so and fly southeast with a strong northwest wind, carrying what appeared to be a medium to large field mouse (Microtus pennsylvanicus) in its feet. (We would estimate the mouse to be at least one-fourth the bulk and weight of the bird.) After flying and being blown 50-100 yards, the bird crossed the refuge road and parking lot #6 and then transferred the mouse to its bill in mid-air. It then continued flying another 75-100 yards and disappeared into a large clump of small trees and bushes in the dunes. After a couple moments at most, and while we were walking in the general direction, the bird flew from the clump 50 yards ahead of us and lit briefly on a perch in a small cherry tree. It then flew back near the site where it had captured the mouse and resumed hunting forays into the brush and grass along the marsh edge for at least another half hour, when we left. We looked for the missing mouse in the shrubbery where the bird had disappeared with it but found nothing.



Northern Shrike

Illustration by Mark Lynch